



State of New Jersey

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March 2, 2009

TO: Chief School Administrators
Charter School Lead Persons
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ROUTE TO: Human Resources Office

FROM: Robert R. Higgins, Ph.D.
Director
Office of Licensure and Credentials

SUBJECT: Online Applications Only Will Be Accepted As of May 1, 2009

Beginning May 1, 2009, the Office of Licensure and Credentials will accept only online applications. The transition from paper to electronic submission represents the achievement of a major benchmark since the inception of the Teacher Certification Information System (TCIS). The immediate benefits to our applicants are twofold: Elimination of time required for mailing and handling of these documents, with the result that applications can be processed faster; and elimination of missing or illegible information which further delays such processing.

With the implementation of this change to our operation, timely in the current climate of limited fiscal and staff resources, two of three planned phases in the reduction of required paper handling and scanning have now been realized. The first was having our examiners work from scanned document images. Restricting applications to online submission is the second. The third will involve online completion and submission of the various required forms issued by our office. Towards this end, the page length of these forms will be reduced to increase efficiency in the scanning process. And we will soon bring the Provisional Teacher Program (PTP) more fully into TCIS – including online registration for training centers, and eventually ‘automatic’ issuance of provisional certificates and of many standard certificates when various online PTP forms are completed by districts.

In announcing this goal, we have taken into account four major concerns:

1. Will there be any exceptions for submission of paper applications? With limited exceptions, the office will not accept paper applications postmarked on or after May 1, 2009. Furthermore, expedited applications will no longer require a paper application for processing. The department is developing guidelines for limited exceptions to this online application rule. We

will share these guidelines with you in March and April, when we will provide training in the online application for district and county office staff.

2. The ‘digital divide’ may prove an unfair barrier to low income and minority applicants.

We do not take this concern lightly. However, all of our applicants are college graduates. The Pew Internet and American Life Project found in 2007 that internet access among college-educated Hispanics was just under 90 percent, for college-educated whites it was 90 percent, and for college-educated African Americans it was just over 90 percent. Further, applicants who do not have a PC, or internet access at home, can access the internet through a public library. For example, there are 70 state library repositories which have internet access. A list of those libraries will be distributed under separate cover.

3. The online application may not be reliable. The Teacher Certification Information System runs in modules, some of which have had significant problems that we have addressed over the past five years. However, the online application has been working since March 2005 without significant problems or interruption in service.

Common issues that negatively impact reliability. Smaller issues related to applicant error and limitations of the original system design have been addressed expeditiously. These include double payments by applicants, misinformation filed by an applicant such as a wrong social security number, changes of address, and lack of birthdates in the system for applicants whose last certification was received in 1995 or prior years. The birthdate issue arises because birthdates, social security numbers, and unique applicant tracking numbers are the three major security fields in TCIS. We will continue to provide quick correction or input of verified birthdates so that applicants can process their applications.

Issues of reliability also apply to paper applications. Specifically, 5 to 10 percent of paper applications themselves arrive with missing information. Completion of these applications requires communication with applicants, taking up valuable staff time. In contrast, online applications cannot be submitted unless all requested information is present.

4. Some applicants are not computer or internet savvy. This undoubtedly is true. Our responses to this concern are:

- Current budget and staffing issues necessitate this change.
- Under our Professional Teaching Standards, all teachers are required to be proficient in the use of digital technologies.
- As all applicants have college degrees, some 90 percent already use the computer and internet.
- The online application has a clearly-written users’ manual available through our website.
- Such applicants can identify a friend, colleague, or librarian to assist them.

We welcome any feedback you want to provide us about other concerns that we should address and how we might address them. Thank you for your attention to this important message.

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c: Members, State Board of Education

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